# Fw: CGS Statement on OSU's Response to Protests

[redacted]@buckeyemail.osu.edu>
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To:[redacted]@buckeyemail.osu.edu>

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The Ohio State University, [redacted]

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**From:** The Council of Graduate Students <cgs@osu.edu>
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 22, 2024 5:37 PM
**To:** [redacted]OSU.EDU [redacted]@OSU.EDU>
**Subject:** CGS Statement on OSU's Response to Protests

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Council of Graduate Students
The Ohio State University

## A Statement from the Council of Graduate Students at The Ohio State University on the University's Response to Protests

As the official representative body for graduate students at The Ohio State University, the Council of Graduate Students (CGS)[1] condemns the use of excessive force and consequent legal repercussions in response to those exercising their civil liberties peacefully, and unequivocally supports free speech and academic freedom. We emphatically oppose the University's responses to protests focused on Palestinian and Pro-Palestinian speech, for example those which occurred on April 23rd [2] and 25th [3] [4], 2024.

Fifty-four years ago, unarmed students were killed and injured by members of the Ohio National Guard at Kent State [5] during the Spring of Dissent [6] that occurred across Ohio while participating in anti-war, anti-imperialist demonstrations. The anniversary of these horrific tragedies underscores the importance of de-escalation and the role that

university leaders have in shaping the outcomes of student advocacy. While there are policies in place for space reservations and supposedly disruptive noise on The Ohio State University's campus, alleged "University Space Rules" violations should not result in violent, militarized responses, and the wanton labeling of student activities as aggressive or violent. The University states that it was following established University procedures when responding to student activities. However, the Ohio State University Police Department and Ohio State Highway Patrol's aggressive engagement tactics escalated the situation. **The "University Space Rules" are created and maintained by the University, and CGS urges OSU to use this power to communicate clearly about alleged breaches of this policy before framing them as violent and to de-escalate responses to alleged violations arising from student activities.**

The disproportionately aggressive responses on the aforementioned dates via the targeted, violent, and islamophobic treatment of protestors in hijabs and keffiyeh, and explicit singling out of student organizers and faculty and staff supporters at these demonstrations deeply troubles CGS. The well-documented events that spurred this statement contradict Ohio State's previous insistence that it is "content neutral" in its treatment of protestors. If OSU and President Carter truly believe in "free speech" and "academic freedom" (which are arguably at the center of OSU's motto, "*Education for Citizenship*") then they cannot and should not threaten students with the possibility of arrest, trauma, and violence for participating in protests. Nor should President Carter express pride in violent police forces [7] [8] [9] that brutalized and mocked students, suppressed free speech, and violated civil liberties [10][11][12] when those he should be proud of are the students of this university who engaged in their constitutionally protected rights [13] as students at an American university. Students have the right to peacefully and openly state their beliefs without the fear of legal persecution, whether or not they violate university policy. **CGS stands in solidarity with many other faculty [14][15] [16] [17], staff, and students [18][19] and urges all relevant units of OSU to immediately work toward the dismissal, expungement, and reversal of all charges and disciplinary actions brought against all students, staff, and community members arrested between April 23rd and April 25th, 2024.**

CGS supports (as it has historically done, including during the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa [20] [21]) protestors and their rights to protest for OSU to make every effort to disclose investments in any organization that would directly or indirectly harm those within the Buckeye Community — in this case, those investments related to military operations of the Israeli nation-state on occupied Palestinian-land. Furthermore, if the University truly believes in shared governance, the University and its Board of Trustees should readily seek and accept feedback directly from students, staff, and faculty regarding divestment from said organizations. **Such actions related to the above aims and others should be discussed in a setting (e.g., a town-hall style meeting for graduate students to speak directly to administrators, moderated by CGS leadership) that is open to all graduate students currently enrolled at OSU. CGS requests that this conversation involve President Carter and all other relevant members of the OSU administration. We further ask that the appropriate units and administrators reach out to CGS no later than May 24th, 2024 to schedule this conversation.**

CGS is OSU's official shared governance partner [22] for all matters related to graduate student experiences at Ohio State. We are alarmed by the lack of intentional communication and consultation from upper administration (specifically the President, the Provost, and the Director of Public Safety) with our democratically elected and publicly accountable leaders. While University Administrators espouse supposed concern for our academic success, well-being, and safety, their lack of communication or consultation directly with CGS regarding the continuation of the lockdown of University buildings after the peaceful May 1st and May 3rd demonstrations on the South Oval was unacceptable. This course of action did not lead to the intended outcome of "*ensuring the business of the university continues uninterrupted,*" as our constituents have reached out to us en masse and informed us that closures have delayed or in some cases halted their work related to the closures or lack of communication about them. We are the arbiters of what is best for us as graduate students; CGS firmly believes in "*Nothing about us without us.*" **CGS reminds the University that while it prides itself on embracing a shared governance model [23], in this instance those efforts fell short. OSU and its administration needs to proactively consider student feedback on all actions concerning student protests, free speech, academic freedom, the right to**

**peaceful assemblies, and decisions that impact graduate student work, education, and free movement around campus.**

We, as the Council of Graduate Students, expect more from our leaders. Peaceful protests should be met with dialogue and curiosity, instead of undue force and fear at the hands of police summoned to campus at the behest of the University. If administrators truly believe in "Education for Citizenship," then political expression and normal campus activities should be encouraged, not met with threats and violence from police and criminalization from administrators. Questions and concerns about University funds and divestment should be met with good-faith engagement from those with the ability to answer them. And finally, democratically-elected student leaders should be welcomed early and often into discussions about OUR safety, success, well-being, needs, and concerns. We look forward to the President's Office upholding their explicitly stated commitment to "*teaching, learning, listening to, and supporting one another as well as peacefully exercising their First Amendment rights on our campus.* [24]" To further build on President Carter's closing words in his April 29th message to the campus community, our Buckeye community is indeed capable of peacefully exercising First Amendment rights on campus "*even – and especially – when it is most difficult.*" [25] **CGS requests that President Carter and his fellow OSU administrators heed their own words by meaningfully rectifying the wrongs done through the violent actions of law enforcement on April 23rd and 25th. We further expect that in this and every other case where students utilize their rights to free speech and peaceful assembly, the administration of OSU will respond with peaceful discourse, open communication, and meaningful action.**

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2088 Ohio Union, 1739 N. High Street, Columbus, OH 43210
cgs@osu.edu | 614.292.4380 | cgs.osu.edu

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